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B. Davidson Horne



Christmas in Sweden

or

A Festival of Light

BY

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BOSTON

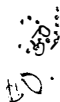
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CHRISTMAS IN SWEDEN



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CHRISTMAS IN SWEDEN

THE FESTIVAL OF LIGHT

"A TELEGRAM for you, sir." Elfreda, the pretty Swedish maid, handed the envelope to Professor Edgecombe as the family were seated at breakfast one spring morning. Telegrams were not unusual in that household, so Dorothy and John, the Professor's children, scarcely heeded the interruption and were unprepared for the excitement which this particular bit of yellow paper aroused in their quiet home. When their father had read the message, he passed it across the table to his wife, who dropped the sugar-tongs in her eagerness, as soon as she had glanced at the message.

"Oh, George," she cried, "it's too good to be true that you really have the appointment."

"What is it?" cried both children in chorus, distracted from their conversation by the unusual excitement of their little mother.

"It means that we are all going to Sweden to spend father's sabbatical year," replied their mother.

"All of us?" asked Dorothy quickly. She had not welcomed the period of rest called a sabbatical year which comes to most New England college professors once in seven years, because she remembered that many of her playmates had spent the year with relatives while their parents travelled in Europe, and home-loving little Dorothy dreaded a similar parting.

"Do you really mean that we are going too?" asked John incredulously.

"That's exactly what your mother means," said Professor Edgecombe. "Mother and I couldn't go away for a year and leave you children at home. Besides it is not going to be entirely a year of rest for me, for this telegram has brought me an appointment to spend the year translating some stories of the old Norsemen into English. The old Icelandic document which I am to study is in Sweden and so we can settle there for the winter."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" cried John, entirely forgetful of tablemanners. "Just listen, Elfreda, we are all going to Sweden, now what do you think of that?"

Clash! batter! bang! the serving-tray fell to the floor and pretty, well-trained Elfreda stood unconscious of disaster, looking from one to another. "Yes, it's true, Elfreda," said Mrs. Edgecombe, "we are going to spend a year in your beautiful country and will have many questions to ask you about it."



By this time the maid had picked up the tray and begun to clear away the dishes, but tender-hearted little Dorothy noticed that, as she came and went during the meal, her eyelids were red and her face was tear-stained.

"What's the matter, Freda?" she asked kindly, as she ran into the kitchen after the meal was over, but she stopped short in alarm at the sight of Freda with her face buried in the roller-towel.

"Leave us alone for a little while, Dorothy," said Mrs. Edgecombe, thinking that she knew the cause of the trouble. Poor Freda was homesick, she thought, and the knowledge that her employers were going to the dear homeland while she remained in strange America was more than she could bear.

"Would you really like to go back to Sweden?" inquired Mrs. Edgecombe, thoughtfully. "We are going to keep house there and I suppose I must find a maid." But Freda shook her head while smiles broke through her tears and she blushed very red. Then she explained that she had promised to marry Eric, who had been her suitor for some time, but she had dreaded to "give her notice" to kind Mrs. Edgecombe, who had so patiently trained her, since she came into her kitchen, a bewildered little emigrant, two years previous.

"Then it wasn't all homesickness," asked Mrs. Edgecombe slyly when she had congratulated the blushing Freda. But Freda's eyes filled again. "No, ma'am, I wouldn't go back to the old country to stay," she said, "but I would like to see my old mother and little brothers and sisters again."

"Where do they live, Freda?" inquired Mrs. Edgecombe. "Perhaps we can go to see them and tell them about your happiness."

"Oh, could you, ma'am, wouldn't it be too far?" cried Freda hopefully.

"If your home is near Upsala, I think we can arrange to see your people," said Mrs. Edgecombe, "for my husband is going to study some of the old manuscripts in the University there." It appeared that she had lived near the old city and Freda began to plan joyfully about the presents which she would send to her dear ones.

It seemed to the children as if the weeks would never pass, but, at length, the great day came when the Edgecombe family

stood on the deck of the big steamship which was to carry them across the ocean. Many of their friends had come to bid them "Bon Voyage," so they were surrounded by a merry party. The warning whistle had just sounded for all visitors to go ashore and Dorothy was beginning to realize with a queer little lump in her throat that a year was a long, long time to be parted among the passengers and saw many amused glances turned from her favorite cousin, when she noticed a sudden commotion towards their own party.

Her father and mother also turned, attracted by the noise, and the whole family was amazed at the sight of Freda and Eric, their faces red and determined as they pushed their way among the passengers, followed by an angry steward. The officer thought that the young foreigners, coming to see their friends in the steerage, had mistaken their way; but, although both Freda and Eric had themselves crossed in the steerage and were a little awed by the splendors of the first-class part of the ship, they were determined to get a last glimpse of the Edgecombes.

When Freda had bidden them farewell, a week before, she had told Mrs. Edgecombe that she should be married within a week, so of course they were very much surprised to see her there. While Professor Edgecombe was explaining to the official, Freda told them that she had made Eric take her to New York on a wedding-trip, especially to see them sail. She had already entrusted the children with a little box of presents for her family and now she proudly showed Mrs. Edgecombe a photograph of her husband and herself, asking her to give it to her old mother with her own hands. Mrs. Edgecombe promised readily and Freda left the ship content. The last thing that the children saw, as the dock faded from view, was Freda, waving her handkerchief in farewell.

Their father left them in Paris, in the late summer, promising

that he would be ready to welcome them when they reached Sweden. First, however, Mrs. Edgecombe took the children to Germany, so that it was late October before they boarded a steamer at Lubec, bound for Stockholm.

They would have liked to have stayed for awhile in this beautiful city, which is sometimes called "The Venice of the North," but their mother was anxious to get settled in her Swedish home, so the following morning, they boarded a train for Upsala.

"Are we really going to keep house just as we do at home?" asked Dorothy, as the train left the rugged country near Stockholm. "I have rented an apartment for the winter," replied their father, smiling, "but you will find that it is quite different from America in many ways."

"I didn't know that they had apartments in Upsala," said John. "I have read that the name means 'The Lofty Halls,' and that the city is more old-fashioned than any other place in Sweden."

"That is true," said Professor Edgecombe, "but Upsala has some modern houses, although it is a very ancient city. The great castle on the hill, which we will visit, the cathedral where we will attend service and some of the University buildings are grand enough to mean 'the lofty halls.'"

"Do the people wear native costume?" asked Mrs. Edgecombe.

"No," said her husband. "Occasionally, perhaps, you will see a peasant wearing one of the pretty old-time costumes but, for the most part, even the peasants as well as the city people wear clothing much like ours."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," said Dorothy, for she had pictured to herself little girls wearing quaint, gaily-colored garments like those that Freda had described to her.

"Never mind, Dolly," said her father, pinching her cheek playfully. "You will find enough that is unusual to satisfy you, I think."

As the train wound through the beautiful farming-country, they caught occasional glimpses of beautiful Lake Mälär, and Professor Edgecombe said that in the spring, they should go to Stockholm by boat and enjoy the trip on the lake.

"The weather is too cold for us to take that trip, now," he said, "and besides we want to get home before dark. You will soon find that the hours of daylight in Sweden at this time of the year are too precious to be used carelessly."

Before the children could ask for an explanation of this speech, the train had reached Upsala. On the platform stood a gentleman who greeted their father very cordially. Their father introduced him as Professor Bjerkander and added that he had been most kind in helping him to prepare their home in Upsala. He left them at the entrance of their new home, promising that his wife and children would call that afternoon.

"That is a mark of courtesy, indeed," said Professor Edgecombe to his wife, "for in this country it is the custom for strangers to call first and you see that Fru Bjerkander is going to conform to our usages."

While he was speaking, he pressed an electric bell beside the pair of great doors which reminded the children of the entrance to a stable. When they opened, however, they saw a good-natured portress, who smiled at them when their father said something to her in Swedish.

They were delighted at the sight of the pleasant rooms opening before them, when they had climbed the stone stairs to the third floor. It had seemed impossible that they could ever make a cosy home in a house that seemed so grim and forbidding. Everything was in order, explained the smiling little maid in

broken English, and they found that her words were quite true. The table was set for their mid-day meal and, except for the unpacking of their trunks and the arrangement of their few books and pictures, the home was ready for them.

"How did you ever do it?" exclaimed Mrs. Edgecombe delightedly to her husband. That gentleman shook his head. "You will have to thank Fru Bjerkander," he said. "She helped me to find Stena, who has done it all under her direction."

"Where did you find Stena?" asked his wife, who was pleased with the neat maid.

"She was waiting for us in the market-place," replied her husband, and then explained that he had heard that all servants are engaged in Sweden during April and October. So he had gone to the market-place with Fru



Bjerkander and had found Stena with many other lads and maids, each armed with a paper showing that they had their fathers' written permission to go out to service.

Very early in the afternoon, it seemed to the children, Fru Bjerkander came to call, bringing with her Helmer and Hedwig, her son and daughter, who were about the age of the Edgecombe children. Much to the relief of John and Dorothy, they found that their new acquaintances could speak English almost as

well as they could speak their own language, so they were soon chatting merrily together.

They heard Fru Bjerkander explaining to their mother that she had been obliged to come early in order to take advantage of the daylight and this caused Hedwig to say to Dorothy, "It's too bad that you came to Sweden when we are having dark nights." Dorothy looked bewildered, so Hedwig's brother hastened to explain: "You know we have most of our visitors in summer, when the daylight lasts half through the night. I dare say your father will take you up north to see the midnight sun, next summer." "Oh, yes, I see what you mean now by dark nights," said John. "You mean they are long ones."

"Yes, they are indeed," said the children. "Very soon it will be so dark at three o'clock in the afternoon that we must have the lights." "But, after all," said Hedwig, "if you had come in the summer time, you wouldn't have been here for Jul-tide, and that is the jolliest time of the whole year. I can hardly wait for the season to come."

"Father told us we would have the longest Christmas we had ever celebrated," said John, "but we didn't quite know what he meant." "Oh," said Helmer, "you only celebrate one Jul in your country, do you? Our fun commences on Christmas Eve, and the day after Jul we have what you would call a second-day Christmas, and then a third-day Christmas. In fact there is some kind of fun on foot until the thirteenth-day Jul or sometimes until twentieth-day Jul, which comes the thirteenth day of January."

"Oh, my," cried Dorothy wistfully, "what fun you must have when you live here and know people." "You're going to have it too, this year," said sweet little Hedwig, who had caught the longing note in Dorothy's voice. "Mother has told us that you are to share all of our Jul-tide frolics."

"That is quite true," added Mrs. Bjerkander as she rose to go. "My children have talked of nothing else but the coming of the young Americans ever since my husband first met their father. I hope they will be good friends."

"We think we are very fortunate to find such friends," replied Mrs. Edgecombe, "and now I shall have no fear of the children being lonely."

They all found the next few days really too short for all they wished to crowd into them. They visited the library of the University where their father was working daily and wandered through the strange streets, watching the throngs of students, who reminded them of the merry college boys in their own town. "Only our boys would never keep their caps clean," declared Dorothy, and their father laughed quite heartily at the thought as he said, "You're right, Dolly." But strange to say, these lively students always managed to keep the little white velvet caps trimmed with a rosette of blue and yellow, the national colors, perfectly clean, and seemed very proud of this mark of distinction which they wore.

One morning they visited the old castle on the hill, another day they went to market with their mother and Stena, who was quite bewildered in her efforts to be a polite servant and at the same time show her new mistress how to trade in this strange market.

They discovered many odd things about their own new home. All the windows were covered with double windows and the cracks in the casements were covered with long strips of white gummed paper, pasted on to keep out any possible draught.

Mrs. Edgecombe was dismayed, when she found that not one window in the whole apartment would open wide enough to let in the crisp cold air.

Her feeling of horror was slight, however, compared to Stena's when she discovered that the new foreign mistress had torn off

the paper and had a storm window removed from each one of the sleeping-rooms. When she found that the Americans slept all night with their windows wide open, the horror of the little maid knew no bounds. She predicted that they would all die within a month and was so distressed that Mrs. Edgecombe, who despaired of ever making her understand in the few words of Swedish and English which each could speak, explained the situation to Fru Bjerkander and asked her to tell Stena that they always slept with their windows open at home.

Much to their amusement, however, pretty, cultured Fru Bjerkander seemed almost as horrified as the little maid. They found, in visiting her house, that she too had the national hatred of a draught and that all the windows of her pretty home were tightly sealed.

Since she could not keep the windows closed, Stena seemed resolved to try and overcome the evil by keeping the rest of the house as warm as possible. Every morning, when they awoke, they found that the wood fire in the great porcelain stove in the living-room had been so carefully tended that there was already a bed of glowing coals in the oven-like opening at the base. The children liked to hurry out from their frosty bedrooms and finish dressing by the great white stove, while the rosy glow from the fire seemed very cheerful on those dark mornings when they had to breakfast by lamplight.

Mrs. Edgecombe had feared that so much darkness would be depressing and, as the days grew shorter until, at length, it was necessary to light the lamps before three o'clock in the afternoon, she wondered if the children would not get homesick.

But they were too much interested in the new sights and experiences to get lonely. Indeed, it seemed to them that the long, long evenings were not half long enough for the work they had to do. They were both busily engaged in finishing Christmas

presents for the dear ones at home, for they realized that it would take many days for their packages to travel to America.

So the days grew shorter and shorter and the nights grew longer and longer as the month of December advanced and all Upsala was filled with preparations for the joyous Jul-tide. The Edgecombe household was no exception for Stena had insisted that the apartment must be thoroughly cleaned before the great festival.

Mrs. Edgecombe could not quite see the necessity for such wholesale cleaning, since they had lived there less than six weeks and Stena was always polishing and scouring. But the little maid was so distressed at the thought of not cleaning that Mrs. Edgecombe let her have her way and the rooms were turned topsy-turvy while Stena swept, dusted and beat furniture to her heart's content.

Professor Edgecombe declared that it was worse than spring house-cleaning in America, for every house he passed in his daily walk to and from the University showed signs of the same upheaval.

One morning, Stena told Mrs. Edgecombe that she was ready for the chimney-sweep and if Mrs. Edgecombe were willing, she had a little cousin who was making his living in that way and whom she would like to employ. Mrs. Edgecombe had expected this request, for she had heard that another strict precaution against fire in all Swedish cities was the law requiring that all chimneys should be swept clean very frequently.

John had been much interested in the small, sooty-faced little lads whom he had occasionally seen running about the streets with their brooms in their hands. He had much wanted to make the acquaintance of one and now thought that he knew enough Swedish to ask him a few questions.

But Stena was quite astonished when her mistress told her to show the little lad into the living-room, after his work was done. She shook her head determinedly. "Too dirty, too dirty," she repeated with emphasis.

"Well," laughed his mother, "if you want to talk with him, John, I think you'll have to go into the kitchen and see him there, when he has finished. Stena is quite right and I do not know as I blame her for not wanting him in her clean room. Tell her to let us know when he is ready."

As the kitchen door closed behind Stena, Mrs. Edgecombe reminded them that there was still one box which had not been unpacked.

"I have neglected to do so because I think that it contains only some of our heaviest winter clothing," she said. "But it has been so long since we packed it that I have almost forgotten what is in it. Suppose we open it, now."

John pried up the cover and Mrs. Edgecombe tore off the papers which covered the top. As she did so, Dorothy uttered an exclamation.

"Freda's box," she cried, "Freda's box!"

Sure enough, there was the package of toys and trinkets which Freda had selected with such loving care in the American stores and entrusted to them to give to her dear ones.

"We must find the family and give these to them, at once," said Mrs. Edgecombe, but she looked puzzled when John inquired, "What's the name and address?"

"Perhaps it's in the box," suggested Dorothy. "All I remember is Freda's telling us that her home was just outside of Upsala." But a careful search of the box revealed no address. The little presents were carefully marked for each member of the family but there was no surname on any one of them and nothing which gave them a clue of the name of the place where



Freda had passed her girlhood and where she had told them a feeble old mother and several younger brothers and sisters were still living.

"I have an idea," said John. "Where's her picture, Mother? Perhaps she wrote it on the back of that."

Mrs. Edgecombe ran to her desk and began searching through her papers. At length she drew out the photograph of Freda, looking very happy in her wedding dress while Eric stood by seeming decidedly stiff and uncomfortable in his best clothes. But, alas! secure in the pride of her new name, Freda, the bride, had written very plainly "Mrs. Eric Svenson" on the back of the photograph, and the only address was the street and number of the little house in America where she and Eric had founded their new home.

"Well," said Mrs. Edgecombe, brightening, "at any rate we can write to her and tell her what we need. There will be plenty of time to hear from her before we leave Sweden."

"I suppose it is all we can do," said John.

"But it's too bad," cried Dorothy. "She talked so much of the Jul-tide, and I know that she intended these things for Christmas presents."

"It is too bad," said Mrs. Edgecombe. She stood the photograph on the table and her eyes filled with tears as she looked at Freda's honest, happy face. Freda had been a faithful maid and Mrs. Edgecombe could not forget how faithful she had been to her in a time of illness and sorrow.

There was a slight sound behind them and Mrs. Edgecombe turned to see Stena standing in a funny attitude, as if she had suddenly become frozen in the very act of making a courtesy. The short winter day had already darkened so that the lamps had been lighted and Mrs. Edgecombe had placed the photograph beneath the lamp where the strong light fell directly upon it.

Before the astonished trio could utter a word, Stena had given a little gasp and, for once forgetful of manners, had made a wild dash into the kitchen and returned in a moment, dragging a very dirty and very much surprised little chimney-sweep behind her. Before he could show any shyness at his strange surroundings, she had pushed him close to the photograph and pointed at the pictured faces with her forefinger.

Then the little sweep did a strange thing, for, heedless of his sooty fingers, he grasped the photograph in both his dirty hands while tears ran from his bright eyes, making white furrows down his black cheeks. Stena, too, careless of her clean room, caught him by the hands and they danced together in their excitement.

"What does this mean?" It was Professor Edgecombe who asked the question as he came in from the hall. "Perhaps you know enough Swedish to find out," replied his wife. "We don't."

In a few minutes, however, they had discovered that Stena was own cousin to their Freda and that she had recognized her photograph instantly. Her first thought had been to show it to the little chimney-sweep, for he was Freda's little brother, only a little chap when she had left home, but now big enough to add his share to the family income.

The family had never allowed him to forget Freda and his greatest ambition was to earn money enough to pay his passage to America, when he should be old enough to go and join his big sister.



He hated to give up the photograph and loosened his hold reluctantly when Stena, at last, made him understand that the American lady had promised Freda to give it to his mother with her own hands and he must wait until she found a time to do so.

"But when can I? Where do they live?" asked Mrs. Edgecombe.

Stena replied that her aunt and cousins lived on a tiny farm about ten miles out of the city. "Could we drive there?" asked Mrs. Edgecombe of her husband. But Dorothy cried out, before he could answer.

"Oh, Mother, I've such a beautiful plan. You know the Bjerkanders have asked us to spend Christmas Eve and Christmas day with them, so that we cannot possibly have a tree of our own. But Helmer says that they keep the tree for many days and that often, on New Year's day, they light it up again and have a party for some poor children.

"Can't we do that here? Oh, do say we may! I do so want to decorate a Christmas tree."

Dorothy stopped, quite out of breath, and Professor Edgecombe looked at their mother, questioningly.

"I think it is a splendid plan," she said, "much better than any I could have suggested."

So Professor Edgecombe explained to Stena that she was to write and explain matters to her aunt and tell her that he would send a sleigh to bring the family to a Jul-tide party on New Year's day, when they would tell them all about Freda.

Stena's face was wreathed with smiles and the eyes of the little chimney-sweep fairly stuck out of his head, as he bowed his thanks for the bright new coin which Professor Edgecombe gave him to pay for his work.

And now the days were busy ones indeed. On the twentieth of December, the old market-place in Upsala was an interesting



place, for there the peasants from the country were erecting little booths, each roofed over with cotton drilling and lighted with lamps and lanterns. Here were sold many trinkets which the peasants had made in anticipation of the holiday season.

Fru Bjerkander invited the Edgecombes to accompany her, when she took her own children to visit the market. She explained that this special market was a very ancient one and that the peasants, according to an old custom, were permitted annually to sell their wares in this way from the twentieth of December, until the end of the month.

The American children were especially delighted with the gingerbread booth where they bought quantities of the Julbocken (Yule-goats) and Julgrisen (Yule-pig). It was true that these gingerbread animals sometimes resembled each other in such a surprising way that it was hard to distinguish the pigs from the goats, but, in spite of that, Dorothy wanted to buy some to send to America. John told her that they would probably dry up and break into pieces, long before they reached there, so she had to content herself with buying some for the New Year's Christmas tree, as she called it.

"You can hang them on the branches, you know, and then give them to Freda's little brothers and sisters to eat afterwards," said Hedwig. "That is the way we always do."

"But why do they have goats and pigs at Jul-tide?" asked John. "Why, don't you know?" replied Helmer, in surprise. "It is to remind us of Thor's goats and Frey's pig, which were sacred to our forefathers."

"Why were they sacred?" asked Dorothy. "Why, the goats drew the giant chariot of Thor, the Thunderer, through the skies," said Hedwig.

"The Yule-pig makes us think of Frey's hog," said Helmer. "It was a magical hog whose golden bristles illuminated the

darkest night and it could run more swiftly than any horse on land or sea."

The American children looked rather bewildered and Dorothy asked why these animals should be especially remembered at Christmas-time.

Helmer and Hedwig laughed outright at this question, for it



seemed really funny to them that any one could be so ignorant of the old stories which they had known from their nursery days, but Fru Bjerkander said kindly, "You must ask your father to tell you something about the ancient gods and their stories, for he is reading about them, every day, in the Edda."

So that evening, the children drew their chairs in front of the great white stove which seemed to be the very heart of

their home these cold winter evenings and clamored for the stories.

"Do you remember," said their father, "what I told you before we left America, that the favorite festival among the heathen people in this part of the world, before Christ was born, came at just this time of the year?"

"Yes, we remember," cried both children. "Well," said their father, "I will tell you why they celebrated at this particular season:

"The ancient inhabitants of Sweden believed that there were many gods, but chief among them they worshipped Odin, the All-Father, Thor, the Thunderer, and Freya, the Sun-god. Odin was the god of war and was served by faithful maid-servants called the Valkyries, whose duty it was to bear the heroes slain upon the battle-field to Valhal, a beautiful region of peace. Thor wielded the thunders and lightnings, as his name implies, but Freya was the most popular of all, for upon his favor depended good harvest, fruitfulness and consequently pleasure. The people celebrated his birthday at the time of the winter solstice, for then the days began to lengthen and it seemed the appropriate time for the birthday of a Sun-god. For twelve days and nights they continued their feasting, but there was one night during the festival which was not joyful, for then the people remembered the anniversary of a great sorrow."

"Oh, what was it?" cried Dorothy, and "Please go on" said John as their father stopped for breath. Professor Edgecombe smiled at their interest, as he continued.

"Balder the Beautiful was beloved by gods and men because he represented goodness and made everything bright and cheerful. Some scholars connect him with Freya and say that he represented the bright summer sun. I said that everybody loved him, but that was not quite true, for he had one enemy, and, as

you might imagine, that was Loki, the god of evil. One night Balder dreamed that he was to die, and when he told his dream to his mother, Frigg, she was so distressed that she made all things animate and inanimate swear that they would not injure her son. From that time on, it was the favorite pastime of the gods to throw stones and other missiles at Balder, because he seemed invulnerable and none of these things could injure him.

“ But wicked old Loki knew that there was one little plant which Frigg had overlooked when she was exacting her oath and so he plotted to kill Balder. He gathered some of the mistletoe berries, that seemed too small and insignificant to do any harm, and gave them to Höor, the blind brother of Balder, who could not share in the fun on account of his infirmity. ‘ Come,’ said Loki, ‘ do like the rest; show honor to Balder by casting this trifle at him and I will direct your hand.’ Höor did as he was bidden and Balder fell dead, pierced through by the mistletoe.

“ Now it happened that the death night of Balder fell on one of the longest nights in the year and the people believed that the darkness came because the God of Light was dead. So, on that night, they made great sacrifices and offered up prayers that they might not lose the light. Especially if the harvests had failed or the huntsmen had been unfortunate in the season just past did they offer sacrifices to Thor beneath an oak which was sacred to the Thunderer. For they thought that he was particularly angry at the people because he was so grieved at the death of Balder the Beautiful.

“ Then, as the days began to grow longer and the nights to grow shorter from that very date, the people thought that their prayers had been answered and so, every year, on the anniversary of his death, they repeated the ceremony and the light never failed them.

"Of course we understand that the sun has reached his southern limit at this time of the year and is returning on his northward journey, but the old idea of making Jul-tide the Festival of Light still prevails among the Swedes, who know that now the worst of the darkness is over and that slowly but surely the sun is coming back to them."

"Well told," exclaimed Professor Bjerkander, who had entered in the midst of the story. "My wife has mentioned the children's interest and I have come to see how you would like to take a sleigh-ride out to the burial-place of the old gods, on Christmas day." The children declared that they should like it above all things and so the invitation was accepted.

"You must come early to our house, on the morning of December 24th, if you want to join in one of our national customs," said Fru Bjerkander, when Christmas week had at last arrived. "To-morrow we celebrate 'dipping day.'"

"What does she mean by that?" asked Dorothy of her mother. "We will have to go and find out, dear," said her mother, "for I have no more idea what she means than you have."

When the Edgecombe family arrived at the home of their friends the next morning, they were ushered into the dining-room, for the living-room was locked and darkened. They all thought it very odd that there were no signs of any preparations for a meal for it was almost noon. Just at twelve, however, Fru Bjerkander invited them into the kitchen, where they were soon seated about a well-spread table. Their hostess then explained in English that it was an old custom all over Sweden for employers and servants to dine together on the day before Christmas, and rich and poor alike ate this meal in the kitchen. "I still fail to understand why you should call it 'dipping-day,'" said Professor Edgecombe.

"I will show you," said Fru Bjerkander, rising. She took from the stove the kettle in which the ham and pork, the chief dishes of the dinner, had been cooked. As she passed it to each one, everybody dipped a bit of bread in the sizzling fat in which the meat had been cooked and ate it with much glee. "On this day we must all doppaigrytan," she said, and Hedwig translated the expression for them by saying "That means that we must all dip in the kettle."

"But why do you do this?" asked Professor Edgecombe. "I do not know," replied Professor Bjerkander, "unless it is because we always have ham and pork at Jul-tide in remembrance of the Jul-boar, which was always roasted whole at the heathen festival."

The short afternoon was soon over and, a few hours later, the children were admitted to the living-room, where the beautiful spruce tree stood in all its glory. The Edgecombes had seen many Christmas trees, but it seemed to them that none had ever seemed so beautiful as this one with its brilliant lights and graceful trimmings.

The children joined hands about it and danced through the rooms and around and around the tree, until they were out of breath. Then the presents were distributed from the tables which stood piled high with gifts beneath the tree, and the Americans were surprised to find so many bearing their own names. Each gift was sealed and tied daintily, while all were accompanied by some appropriate little verse, for the Swedes think that no gift is quite complete unless there is a little poem with it.

When, at length, the Edgecombe family went home, they met parties of merry masqueraders who were joking together and having the best of times as they delivered packages from house to house. They understood that these were the servants, who

were allowed to amuse themselves in this way while they did their duty of delivering their master's gifts.

Very early the next morning, they all started for the old cathedral to attend matins, the early service which good Lutherans always attend on Christmas morning. The streets were still dark and the lights of the cathedral shone out brightly as they approached the great open doorways. But, in spite of this, they were quite unprepared for the burst of brilliancy which met their gaze when they entered the church. Everywhere they gazed was a light, and the children said that now they understood why so many of their Swedish friends still referred to Jul-tide by its old-fashioned name of the Festival of Light.

Before the morning was far advanced, the Bjerkanders had called for them and they were all snugly packed into the great roomy sleigh drawn by prancing horses which were covered with white nets and decorated with nodding plumes. It seemed to the children that even the horses acted as if they knew it was holiday time, for they danced along so gaily.

The three miles were quickly covered and they came to the place where stand the three great mounds which the Swedes say mark the graves of Odin, Thor and Freya, the great gods of their forefathers.

"Were they really buried here?" asked Dorothy in awe.

"Probably not," said her father; "it is generally supposed that the mounds really mark the graves of ancient kings."

Then Professor Bjerkander took them to the little Christian church that stands on the site of the old heathen temple and the children tried to imagine the great halls glittering with gold and silver and filled with people offering sacrifices to Thor the Terrible, while they mourned for Balder the Beautiful.

So they drove back into the city, their minds full of the Norse gods while their hearts were thankful that the days of that



wild religion were over and that the birthday of the Prince of Peace was the day they were celebrating.

For dinner, they had the three chief dainties of the season, lusk-fish which had been prepared by heating for several days in wood-ashes, rice sweetened and flavored with cinnamon, and roast goose. The children missed the roast turkey and cranberry sauce which their own Grandma always cooked but they, were hungry and did ample justice to their Swedish dinner.

Second-day Christmas and third-day Christmas passed all too quickly and the Edgecombe children had almost as good a time as on the great day itself. For now their friends, like themselves, were free to skate and ski and enjoy all the winter sports of that northern land. Amidst all their pleasures, they prepared for their party, which was to be the crowning feature of the week. A beautiful spruce tree was decorated for the occasion and Mrs. Edgecombe bought plenty of Julbocken and Julgrisen to trim it, with other dainties peculiar to the season. To Freda's little store of gifts she added others of her own selection, and invited the Bjerkander children to help entertain the guests, for she thought that she might have to call upon them to help her deliver Freda's messages. And so it proved, for when they came, they could only smile and courtesy to Freda's mistress. Stena had to talk for them, but her English was limited, and so the Bjerkander children acted as interpreters.

The guests seemed very grateful for their gifts and delighted with the tree, but nothing pleased them as Freda's own presents, and it seemed as if they would wear the photograph out, as they passed it from one to the other, admiring it and chatting about "Freda's man." When they went home, Freda's mother thanked Mrs. Edgecombe for her kindness with tears in her eyes and an expression of gratitude on her face which needed no translation into English. They asked the Americans to come and see them

and Professor Edgecombe promised that, when the summer days came, before they returned home, they would drive out and visit the little red cottage which had been Freda's girlhood home.

So they went away happily and the Edgecombe family, having bidden farewell to their other guests, gathered to talk it over in the light of the glowing fire.

"To-morrow, we must all take time to write to the home-folks about our Christmas in Sweden and we mustn't forget to tell every detail of the novel experiences we have enjoyed," said their mother. "Perhaps we will each take some particular part of the celebration to describe and then no one of us will have to write too much."

"I want to tell about 'Dipping Day,'" said Professor Edgecombe. "I choose to write about the Julbocken and the Julgrisen," said Dorothy.

"Then you had better write all about Freda's family and our New Year's party," said John to his mother, "for I would like to write out the story of Balder the Beautiful. I think writing it out would help me to remember it and I don't want to forget it."

"I am quite satisfied with my part of the letter-writing," said his mother, "for entertaining Freda's family was the happiest part of the week for me. How glad they will all be to get the letter," she added softly.



So with tender thoughts of the friends at home, they all sat quiet for awhile, gazing into the depths of their golden fire and thinking that the Swedish Festival of Light had indeed been the merriest Yule-tide of their lives.

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